

Magic and the Songstress: Theocritus Idyll 2

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The Second Idyll of Theocritus takes the form of a spell which is intended to restore the affections of Simaetha's beloved. Failing in that purpose, it nevertheless succeeds in a way unintended by the speller herself; the mere performance of the spell makes the singer feel better in the end. The technique of the Second Idyll can therefore be compared with that of the Eleventh, where Polyphemus, after failing to win the object of his affections, has his song to thank for curing the pain of unrequited love. Both points have been well established.¹ What is distinctive about the Second Idyll, and neglected, is the spell itself as a form of *poiesis* and therefore as therapy. In myth and literature a woman anguished in love was much more likely than a man so anguished to turn to magic. Not only did magic claim to offer her one of the few solutions available to her to counter resistance in love, namely a chance to either restore the beloved or punish him; it also provided her, in the absence of some characteristically male alternatives, with an appropriate vehicle for therapeutic self-expression, *her* antidote to the miseries of unrequited love.

We begin with the claim that through song Simaetha and the Cyclops "come to master their turbulent and otherwise uncontrollable emotions."² Our conclusion will be that for these victims of unrequited love, neither the cure nor the song that engineers it is precisely identical. To what extent the

¹ See P. Henkel's summary of the scholarship, *Zu Theokrit*, in *Serta Philologica Aenipontana*, ed. R. Muth (1962) 191–214. More recent discussions include Gilbert Lawall, *Theocritus' Coan pastorals* (Harvard 1967) 7 f.; F. T. Griffiths, "Poetry as *Pharmakon* in Theocritus' Idyll 2," in *Arktouros: Hellenic Studies Presented to Bernard M. W. Knox* (New York 1979) 81–88. Charles Segal (I), *Poetry and Myth in Ancient Pastoral* (Cornell 1981) 73–84; (II) "Space, Time, and Imagination in Theocritus' Second Idyll," *Classical Antiquity*, vol. 4. 1 (1985) 103–19. On the influence of mime here, see A.S.F. Gow, *Theocritus*, vol. II (Cambridge 1950) 33–35; Pierre Monteil, *Théocrite* (Paris 1968) 50 f., sees mime converted in the Second Idyll into "vérité psychologique."

² Lawall (above, n. 1) 8. Among other relevant studies of Idyll 11, see: Ettore Bignone, *Teocrito* (Bari 1934) 201 f.; E. B. Holtzmark, "Poetry as Self-Enlightenment: Theocritus 11," *TAPA* 97 (1966) 253–59; Edward W. Spofford, "Theocritus and Polyphemus," *AJP* 90. 1 (1969) 22–35; R. Schmid, "Theocritus 11. The purblind poet," *CJ* 70. 4 (1975) 32–36.

experiences of singer and songstress here can be read as typically male and female is a question to be addressed in due course.

The Cyclops' cure is called a *pharmakon* (*Id.* 11, 1–3, 17). *Pharmakon* means “remedy” in general, “drug” in particular, whether literally as substance (cf. *Id.* 2. 161) or figuratively as intoxicating power. In the Eleventh Idyll *pharmakon* is explicitly defined as “the Muses.” As a charm it fails to beguile the beloved into reciprocal passion (63: “Come, Galatea . . .”), but it cures the singer himself of his “madness” (11, 71). In fact, the Idyll centres on a playful exchange between the ways of music and of medicine. Theocritus gently mocks the doctor's art for its inability to cure love-sickness, yet song apes medical procedure: both are means whereby the disease is allowed to run its course until it reaches its climax of pain, the fever breaks, and the patient returns to a normal condition of body and mind. The singer's cure is at once the healing of his diseased emotions and an act of self-discovery: Polyphemus finds out who he really is, and by the same token he is able to *poimainein* his passion (80) and so be healed. The literal meaning of *poimainein* is to “shepherd,” suggesting control, here, punningly, the mastering of emotions which is also the formal mastering that, according to such critics as Horace and Longinus, constitutes *poiesis*. We are reminded that *νομός* meaning “pasture” or habitable area, and *νόμος* meaning “custom,” “law,” “music” are essentially the same word. In the end the singer has found the way to order his unruly passion, containing it and shaping it into both sense and poetic resolution that are triumphs of clarity: “O Cyclops, Cyclops, where have you flown to in your wits?” (72). The singer then rehearses the truth he has newly discovered—that he is a somebody on land with ewes at his beck and call who has no business with a nymph of the sea. Thus did he find his remedy. Thus did he “shepherd his love” (17, 80). To turn the Eleventh Idyll into a Freudian case-study would be to butcher its distinctive qualities as a whimsical poem. I have drawn attention merely to its explicit language of cure as the work of song. The Muses are the Cyclops' *pharmakon*; they embody what we may call Apollonian form, that is the capacity shared by prophecy, law, medicine, music, and shepherding (we remember that Apollo was once a herdsman) in their most constructive guises to reduce disorder to order and madness to sense. Or at least to *claim* to do so—it is the assumption that matters.

The Thirtieth Idyll provides a parallel. Its love-sick minstrel finds relief only in endurance: “I must stretch out my neck its full length and drag the yoke” (28 f.). We compare Simaetha's “I will endure my longing as I have endured it” (164). But this male poet, like Polyphemus, arrives at his conclusion after a self-injunction to be sensible (*ἄρα τοι φρονέην*, 14) and a lengthy rational weighing of the evidence (14–27) which concludes with wise advice from his own soul. His distant ancestor is Archilochus, who

appealed to his downcast soul to think rationally about life's misfortunes: "learn the rhythm by which men are bound" (*fr.*128).³

Like Polyphemus Simaetha is the victim of unrequited love, like him she resorts to lyrical, that is, self-expressive poetry to do something about it, like him she seeks to change her beloved's response, and like him she finally changes her own state of mind. These similarities have been well explored but there are differences also; these have been less well explored. Simaetha's song takes the form of a demonic hymn, and in so doing reveals a significantly different structure, imagery, mood, and resolution. We look first at some of her song's hymnal and demonic properties. Like many another speller Simaetha fails in her conscious purpose, for reasons that could be properly explained only with reference to the psychology that creates and sustains belief in systems of magic. But our concern here is with Simaetha's success; that is, with the effect of the spell on the singer herself as self-expressive, self-healing therapy, and the extent to which the fantasies of myth and literature are likely to have mirrored in this regard the real experience of Greek women.

While it may be true that the typical Theocritean pastoral is not tightly structured, a chain of links leading to a conclusion,⁴ we do find in the Second Idyll, perhaps because it is not a typical pastoral, a careful and effective design that forces Simaetha's emotions into redemptive shape. The larger principle organising this design is hymnal form. After a brief introduction to her problem and her intentions (1–10), Simaetha invokes supportive deities—Selena, Hecate, and a divinized *iunx*; and she returns to hymnal invocation at the end of the Idyll (163) via a conventional *vûn* (159) and forms of *χαίρειν* (163, 165). Also, beginning and end are conventionally ringed: *καταδήσομαι* (3, 10, 159); *χαῖρ'* (14), *χαίροισα* (163), *χαῖρε, χαίρετε* (165), *Σελάνα* (10), *Σελαναιά* (165). The first refrain (throughout 17–57), bidding the demonically potent bird-wheel to grant her request, extends the opening invocation. The second refrain, to Selana, introduces and punctuates the section of the hymn that falls between the opening and closing apostrophes, the narrative recollection (69–135), technically called the hypomnesis. (That the reminiscence is here a rehearsal not of the deity's manifested power in the past but of the singer's personal experience is a not unusual adaptation of the hypomnesis in secularized versions of hymnal form.)⁵ The hymnal arrangement of the Second Idyll is assertively clear, although the hymn is finally both demonic and lyrical, that is, both a spell and an outpouring of personal emotion.

³ Cf. Achilles' advice to Priam that humans must endure whatever sorrows the gods send, a measure of his own return to sanity and of the part that logic has played in that return (*II.* 24. 525–51).

⁴ Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1969) 47.

⁵ See H. Parry, *The Lyric Poems of Greek Tragedy* (Toronto and Sarasota 1978) 26–28.

The deities Simaetha invokes and seeks to bind have magic as their province. The line between supplication and compulsion can be a fine one, especially when the invoked deity is an ambiguous Olympian like Hermes, Aphrodite, or Apollo.⁶ Simaetha's imperatives, to Hecate and Iunx (14, 17, etc.), smack of the *katadesmos*; binding the gods of magic, she will be able to bind Delphis too (3, 10). She raises her curtain on a stage of chilling presences: on Selana, who is no Olympian, on Hecate who makes hounds shiver as she crosses graves and dark blood, and on the demonic Iunx. The Artemis she turns to is another face of Hecate, a goddess of the crossroads (33–36). And when she mentions Aphrodite, it is with an eye to her support in turning the rhomb (3). She also lets us know early that this is the world of Circe and Medea and their *pharmaka* (15 f.). The details of her ritual actions speak to the magician's sombre intentions; her insistent refrains and the strict patterns of her verse, based on the magical number three and multiples,⁷ are the mesmerising rhythms of her art. If after the last appearance of the refrain at 135 we begin to forget that Simaetha is treating the dark art, she herself reminds us when she returns to binding threats, and worse, before the end (159–61). And her quiet farewell to Selana brings to mind the dismissal of spirits at the close of magical ceremony, especially necromancy.⁸

The Second Idyll is a spell in the form of a demonic hymn, but it is a demonic hymn serving the ends of self-expression. Like sorrowing Gilgamesh raising the dead Enkidu, or raging Medea calling on Hecate to fortify her drugs, Simaetha is in part at least a lyric poet plumbing the depths of her passionate feelings. If at times she seems less than *docta*,⁹ it is because her gaucherie is appealing and poetically effective. To select a few of the many points where the spell reveals the singer's mind, we begin with a number of images whose ambiguous effects seem to mirror the ambiguity of Simaetha's purposes. The love-philtre Simaetha resorts to to bend Delphis' will is an unsettling image; the *philtro*n is a drug, and every drug inspires at once the hope of a cure and the fear of unpredictable effects. Most often turned to by the female and in its contents usually expressive of corruption and death,¹⁰ the philtre also embodies male fear of the female lover. Fire too, which figures prominently in Simaetha's ritual, provides a metaphor of the dangerous energy that lies at the heart of erotic experience and intent. Even deities lend themselves to possibilities of lyrically expressive focus. Iunx, as Detienne has shown, is an image able to mediate

⁶ These are often invoked in spells: see the examples in Karl Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri* (Leipzig 1928), *passim*.

⁷ See Gow (above, n. 1) 39.

⁸ See Gow (above, n. 1) 62 f.

⁹ See Griffiths (above, n. 1) 83 f. R. W. Johnson thinks that Simaetha is, appealingly, not very good at magic either: *The Idea of Lyric: Lyric Modes in Ancient and Modern Poetry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1982) 168.

¹⁰ Cf. Horace, *Epod.* 5. 30–40; Apuleius, *Met.* 3. 17.

between contrary sides of *eros*.¹¹ She is therefore the handmaiden of Aphrodite, who brought the *iunx* to men,¹² who turns the rhomb, and who sits at the divide between *eros* as compulsion and *eros* as the confusions of the lover's mind, full of hope and full of menace.¹³ Once acknowledged, this goddess deepens the meaning of *Iunx*, casting her shadow over the entire poetic narrative and its revelation of the singer's passions.

So strict are the formal patterns of Simaetha's song that the few irregularities inevitably help concentrate the energy of the singer's emotions. The final appearance of the second refrain at line 135 is notably curious. The first refrain contributes to the formally monotonous rhythms of magical ceremony. The second refrain, an apostrophe to Selana, belongs to a pattern of rhythmical effects that is not only different but also less monotonous, since it does not consistently separate off discrete units of thought. It interrupts a single sentence at line 105. And, most peculiarly, the final rehearsal of the refrain at 135 cuts across Simaetha's recollection of her lover's words which continue to 140. One might have expected him to reach an end at 134 immediately before the refrain, or his appeal to be closed off by a thirteenth appearance of the refrain at 141. After the first series of refrains, to *Iunx*, which mark the compulsions of magic ritual and the emotional energy that feeds them, the second series that introduces and punctuates the hypomnesis both suggests formal continuity yet establishes a change of pace. The new set of line clusters suggests a continuation of the pulse beat of magic, but the fire of sorcery has now become the metaphorical fire of passion recollected. The descriptive, quieter tone in these clusters helps diminish the force of the beat, and so reduces our surprise when the narrative thrust of the sentence at 104 carries it across the refrain in the following line. This break occurs shortly after the midpoint of the second set of refrains; it therefore makes it all the easier to tolerate the dislocation with which the set concludes. Delphis' words sweep over the refrain, incorporating it into the flow of Simaetha's thoughts as she reaches the climax of her reminiscence, her confession that she was "easily persuadable" (ταχυπειθής, 138) to submit to her lover's embrace, indeed that finally she solicited it: "taking his hand I drew him down on the soft bed." No refrain breaks the final 22 lines of the hypomnesis, from Delphis' winning argument, that Eros "with terrible madness" scares the maiden from her chamber (136 f.), to Simaetha's concluding fear that she must now have been betrayed by her lover.

¹¹ Marcel Detienne, *Les jardins d'Adonis: la mythologie des aromates en Grèce* (Paris 1972); and see Segal I (above, n. 1) 73–83.

¹² Pind. *P.* 4, 214–17; on *iunx* and *rhombos*, see Gow (above n. 1) 41, 44.

¹³ On Simaetha's mixed motives, see Gow (above, n. 1) 40, 46; Griffiths (above, n. 1) 85. On the connexions between the setting of Idyll II and Simaetha's confused and violent emotions, see Lawall (above, n. 1), 16; also Monteil on Simaetha's "strange isolation" (above, n. 1, 51). The singer also becomes trapped by the formal correspondence between spell and curse, each a form of "binding."

And so the majestic formalities of the Second Idyll finally serve the self-expressive needs of a love-sick girl. But does Simaetha achieve roughly the kind of catharsis Polyphemus achieves through his song? Those who believe so¹⁴ point to Simaetha's words: "I will endure my passion as I have endured it" (164). The dismissal of spirits coincides with the singer's change of mood. Her ceremonial hail and farewell also perhaps recalls the ending of such impassioned songs as those of Odysseus: "All fell silent, held by the spell (κηληθμῶ)"¹⁵ The concluding silence is part of the performance itself, the moment when singer and audience alike absorb the import of the song before finally "the spell is broken."

And then there is Selana. Simaetha at first pairs her with the infernal goddess Hecate, next isolates her as a celestial witness in the first series of refrains, then links her with "rosy dawn" and the rhythms of the diurnal round (142-48). In her final appearance "with shining throne" Selana suggests beauty without menace, especially in the context of "quiet night" (166). It is an appropriate setting for Simaetha's own quiet mood. The spell reaches its conclusion, the song its form, the singer her catharsis.

But the differences between the Second and Eleventh Idylls are as informative as the similarities. Simaetha's song does not close on the imagery or language of cure. She does not, like the Cyclops, come to recognize the folly of her sentiments. Nor does she emerge from that folly into enlightenment, restored at last to a sense of the community to which she properly belongs and aware of her true interests. Instead, the fire of her conflicting emotions seems more subdued than extinguished. She expresses at the end no hope of winning Delphis. The only alternative to that hope has been, throughout, her desire to punish him. That wish receives its climactic expression in the image of the *kaka pharmaka* (161). We hear no apology for that turn of mind, indeed no departure from it. Only the note of resignation and the imagery of redeemed nature suggest some change of direction. But if her resignation reminds us of the male singer's response in the Thirtieth Idyll, yet it is not like his the product of considered analysis. It is therefore more fragile, a sigh that fails to recognize even the theoretical possibility of better alternatives. As for the beauty of the night sky, comforting though it is, it cannot entirely erase the very recent image of the murderous *kaka pharmaka* or the ringing technique of a hymn that opens with invocations of Moon and Hecate (10-12) and closes with farewells to "Mistress" (162) and Moon (165).

¹⁴ Among discussions of the Idyll's close, see Griffiths (above, n. 1) 87 f.; Segal (above, n. 1) I. 84; II. 112-19. Segal in particular makes an intriguing case for "some increase of understanding and control," for an "emerging self-understanding" on Simaetha's part. But the comparatively inexplicit, indirect, and ambivalent manner in which Simaetha finds her release, certainly any sense of "self-understanding," suggests a significantly different experience.

¹⁵ *Od.* 13. 1-2. In Homer it is the audience whose silence is explicitly referred to, in Vergil the singer's: *conticuît tandem factoque hic fine quievit* (*Aen.* 3. 718).

Simaetha the love-sick magician is the creation of a male imagination. Is her experience authentically female? Evidence is largely circumstantial, but we cannot overlook Sappho's *Hymn to Aphrodite*.¹⁶ The penultimate stanza of this ode (21–24) is among the controverted lines of ancient verse: "If she flees, soon shall she follow; if she accepts not gifts, she'll offer them; if she loves not, soon she'll love, even unwillingly." A number of points are relevant to the present investigation. The poem is a plea to the Goddess of Love for release from the cares of unrequited love: "Don't keep on oppressing my heart with pain and anguish, but come . . . (3–5); release me from harsh care (25 f.)." How the goddess will help is disputed. On a previous occasion recalled by the poet Aphrodite asked, "Whom yet again am I to persuade to restore you to her affection? (18 f.)." Most critics take this past event as a mirror of the present. Giacomelli, however, points out the absence of an object in the promises "she shall pursue, give, love", and suggests that they express the general law that the insouciant beloved will inexorably in time become the anguished lover "against her will." It is the recital of this law with its promise that the biter will be bit that comforts Sappho.¹⁷

Whether Sappho hopes for another reconciliation or expects that the tables will be turned, the climax of Aphrodite's words is, as Cameron long ago pointed out, "couched in a form which has magical associations paralleled in the *Magical Papyri*."¹⁸ In the mouth of a child, the words might be the jingling accompaniment to a skipping game. As the promise of Aphrodite, goddess of beguilement, they suggest a compulsive spell. The jingle itself, the inexorable future tenses, and the final reference to the victim's unwillingness all suggest compulsion. Whatever threat these words pose the victim, can their very form, rhythm, and pedigree, as well as their content, also be read as an example of how Sappho in her *erotika* "gives vent to the passions of her heart . . . so curing her *eros* with the

¹⁶ There are echoes in the Second Idyll "*étrangement près de Sappho*" Monteil (above, n. 1) 51; for an earlier discussion of Sapphic echoes, see Ph.-E. Legrand, *Études sur Théocrite* (Paris 1898) 121, 350. Simaetha's account of passion's assaults, leaving her now fevered, now pale, remembers Sappho's remarkable self-analysis (31). Griffiths finds bathos in the shift from the girl's Sapphic (and Medean) pose to her "abrupt descent to babies and dolls" (above, n. 1, 83).

¹⁷ Anne Giacomelli, "The Justice of Aphrodite in Sappho Fr. 1," *TAPA* 110 (1980) 135–41.

¹⁸ A. Cameron, "Sappho's prayer to Aphrodite," *HTR* 32 (1939) 1–7; see too C. Segal, "Eros and Incantation: Sappho and Oral Poetry," *Arethusa* 7. 2 (1974) 148–50. Sappho's goddess is Aphrodite *doloplokos*. The epithet means "wile-weaver"; it suggests love's "magical deceptions, but suggests too, perhaps, that *eros* can weave lyrical poems out of its own intense experiences. Johnson (above, n. 9) calls the poetess herself *doloplokos* (46 f.). There may be echoes too of "crafty" Hermes, a god of magic and of poetry: on *dolos* see N. O. Brown, *Hermes the Thief* (New York 1947) 6 f. There is a temptation to translate *koma* in 2. 8 as "sleep of enchantment" (D. A. Campbell, Loeb *Greek Lyric* 1, 57), because of the sense of hypnotic effect, but this is perhaps metaphorical magic. On the other hand, see Eva Stehle Stigers, "Sappho's Private World," in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, ed. H. Foley (New York 1981) 45–61: she refers to those who have emphasised "the atmosphere of magic and incantation in [Sappho's] poems" (45).

sweet-voiced Muses?"¹⁹ Her final appeal for "release from care" is both an injunction for future action and a mark of what the poem is already achieving as a therapeutic exercise.

To ask whether Greek women turned to spells for relief more often than men did, and whether the spell suggested itself as a form of *poiesis* more readily to the female poet than to her male counterpart, is to immerse oneself in conjecture. The more general one's answers, the more tentative and vulnerable they must be. Apart from what is left of Sappho and the even skimpier fragments of other female writers, the Greek and Roman poetess—that is, the woman who sings—is for us the creation of a male imagination. From the Choruses of tragedy to the *Heroides* of Ovid, most of our songstresses are, like Simaetha, the fictions of a male Muse. What we "know" about female poets and female magic is mostly what the male imagination conceived these to be. But, *faute de mieux*, we must listen to what myth and male poetry have to say, testing such evidence against the certain or probable conditions of ancient life.

Several points suggest themselves. First, the experience of women must have varied from rank to rank, from place to place, and from time to time. And so must the kind of poetry that reflected such variations.²⁰ Antigone and others in Greek tragedy, for example, might have counterparts in the real world in Queen Artemisia of Halicarnassus and Argive Telesilla, a poetess remembered for the initiative she took in resisting Spartan aggression. On the whole, however, Greek women were by the conditions of ancient life typically excluded from the world "out there" and so had available fewer opportunities to balance intense experiences against intellectual alternatives grounded in possibilities of social action. Where Polyphemus, shaggy shepherd that he is, thinks and acts like the most urbane of Greek males, Simaetha suggests the typical female reduced by social circumstance and realistic expectation to more limited alternatives.

Another assumption that persists in Greek myth and may well reflect real life is that the true magician is female. Male associations with effective magic are weak in the Archaic and Classical periods.²¹ Female associations

¹⁹ Philoxenos paraphrased by Plutarch (*Am.* 18).

²⁰ On varieties of female experience and possibilities in Greece and Rome, a good place to start is Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women in Greece and Rome* (Toronto and Sarasota 1977). Also *Reflections of Women in Antiquity* (above, n. 18); *Women in the Ancient World*, ed. John Peradotto and J. P. Sullivan (Albany 1984); Elaine Fantham, "Women in Antiquity: A Selective (and Subjective) Survey (1979–84)," *Classical Views* 30, N.S.5 (1986) 1–24. J. Winkler well notes that "all social codes can be manipulated and subverted as well as obeyed" (*Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, 64); but, despite such examples of political initiative as those displayed by Artemisia and Telesilla, ancient social codes seem generally to have intensified whatever differences between male and female experience may be attributed to biology (on which see Stigers in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, 49 f.).

²¹ Practitioners like the *magi*, a "barbarian" import, are often denounced as mere tricksters (cf. *Eur. Or.* 1497–99; *Bacch.* 234) and remain well away from the centre of Greek thought and imagination. Hadrian had his own magician at court, but even now in Roman times, when

are correspondingly strong: the entire panoply of Thessalian witches, led by the daunting Erichtho, springs immediately to mind. Only in the area of song is male magic at all prominent. But in recorded Greek times at least male and female song charm in different ways. Magic and song, it is widely believed, were in most cultures at first inseparable;²² the Welsh bard Taliesin, son of a witch and himself a magician, is our paradigm. In the earliest Greek literature, however, musical magic has begun to divide into the literal and therefore menacing potency of certain kinds of spellbinding song, the province of females, and into the more figurative enchantments of male music. Homer's Phemius "beguiles" his audience with his sweet song (*Od.* 1. 337), but this is the largely metaphorical charm of persuasive and delectable entertainment. There is nothing even in Orpheus' magic comparable to the varied and sinister forces which surround the spells of Circe or Medea or Simaetha. Myth reflects the popular belief, maintained from Homer to Theocritus, that male "charms" are figurative—either sweet music or verbal trickery (well exemplified in the scorn heaped on sophistic rhetoric by critics like Hippolytus' father superior to its "charms"²³), while female charms are literal and dangerous magic in all the areas where magic operates, including that of musical beguilement.

More than one commentator on the Second Idyll has suggested that Delphis casts his own *epaoide* on Simaetha.²⁴ But the text, while attesting to the dominion of *eros* over Simaetha, nowhere colours the effect Delphis

popular beliefs in magic have risen closer to the surface of official life, the male magician is an obedient servant. In the imaginative world of ancient mythology, male sorcery is almost unknown, except in references, largely figurative, to musical beguilement. Vergil's Moeris, who dispenses magical drugs (*Ec.* 8. 95–99), is the counterpart of Simaetha's "Assyrian stranger" (*Id.* 2. 162) and is not heard of before or later (unless the harmless shepherd of the Ninth Eclogue is the same Moeris). Anyway, it is the female singers of both the Idyll and the Eclogue who imaginatively embody the mind of the magician. The Telchines, malignant magician smiths, are very shadowy figures, as are the Curetes and Dactyli. The latter have connexions with medical charms and with music; if the legends of Orpheus are any guide, such healing and musical powers are likely to have fallen under the tutelage of Apollo as god of harmony in its many forms.

²² Brown (above, n. 18) 31 f., finds the origin of song in the intoned formulae of magical incantations, related to heraldic function. And see Jacqueline de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Harvard 1975) 4 f., 11–13; Northrop Frye, *Spiritus Mundi* (Indiana 1976), 123–47. On ceremonial magic as itself a form of art, see E. Butler, *Ritual Magic* (Cambridge 1949) 3 f., 295 f.

²³ *Hipp.* 1038–40. On magic and rhetoric, see de Romilly (above, n. 22) 26–32. We do find males occasionally associated with necromancy, for example Odysseus, but Homer's hero is here a poor poet compared with his eastern counterpart, Gilgamesh, doing no more than dutifully repeat the words and carry out the instructions given him by Circe (*Od.* 10. 516–29; 11. 24–36). The male singers who raise the dead Darius are highly lyrical performers, but of course they are exotic Persians; even so, Darius adds a touch of Greek rationalism when he says that he was able to defy the usual restrictions imposed on the dead because of his despotic authority in the underworld (*Aesch. Pers.* 623–80).

²⁴ Most recently, Griffiths (above, n. 1) 86.

has on her with magical terms, literal or figurative. Simaetha on the other hand seeks literally to enchant her beloved. Magic is female and for the most part malignant; the spell—the form resorted to by magicians like Circe and Medea, by seductive singers like the Sirens, and by ladies like Simaetha for whom song is at least partly a weapon—is one of its malignant forms. The male bard, from the Homeric court minstrel to Pindar, unites with his audience in a healing exercise, “magical” in its shamanic assumptions, yet implications of effective magic are always very weak. Phemius’ offerings are *thelkteria*, “beguilements” (*Od.* 1. 337), but again the figurative connotations are clear: where the spell is only one of the ways a female demonstrates her magical power, male “spellbinders”, even Orpheus, that most shamanic of singers, have no other connections with sorcery.

These contrary images of the singer and the songstress derive in large part from male values that underlie social structure and determine roles within that structure. From Homer on the poet’s task is to order his inspiration within the limits of social tolerance, to be *utilis urbi*. Inspired by divine Muses and possessing unusual powers of memory and insight, the poet must strike a difficult balance between the pain or awesome grandeur of remembered events and the poetic form that orders them into beautiful and so acceptable and useful experiences. Where the poet fails to achieve that balance he must accede to the authoritative voice of the society he serves. Penelope, distressed by the troubling exempla of Phemius’ song, bids him cease; Telemachus, assuming the weightier authority of the male, overrides her (*Od.* 1. 340 f.; 346 f.). And we recall the Athenians’ harsh reaction to Phrynichus when his *Milesians*, dwelling on the fate of the islanders in 494 B.C., caused the audience more pain than pleasure.

Where one kind of stereotype puts the male charmer as poet within the social order and makes him its servant, a Merlin who knows his place, another puts the female charmer as poet outside and makes her a threat. Our examples must once again be imaginative and so handled with caution. But there are no female poet laureates in the courts of Homeric kings. The songstresses of Homer are Circe (*Od.* 10. 221) and the Sirens. What the latter offer sounds at first blush precisely the same as what male singers offer. They “know everything”, in particular the events of the Trojan War, and they claim that their listeners will derive both pleasure and enlightenment from their song. Why, then, is their song so dangerous? One could say that it is not the performance itself but what the Sirens do afterwards, having once enticed their victims, that constitutes the peril. But Homer insists that it is precisely their “voices” and their “song” that are lethal (*Od.* 12. 41; 44). The Sirens’ song is not merely a ruse to entrap the unwary, it is itself a menace, the dangerous, beguiling side of *molpe*, song’s extraordinary power in its most nakedly disorienting form. If it is not to destroy, it must be mastered by the ordering power of Odysseus’ intelligence

or of Orpheus' lyre (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4. 909).²⁵ The Sirens' song suggests binding as *katadesmos*, a demonic counterpart of order and a purpose of the spell.

Of course, in real life the line between male and female sensibility and practice can never have been rigid. We are talking about typical emphasis. But one might find in Longinus' account of the poet's task an enduring male ideal from Homeric to much later times, at least in the Greek period, a reflection of male status, role, and opportunity in the community: "to reduce inspiration to order" (*De Sublim.* 33. 5).

It is an ideal that seems to inform not only the "socially useful" poem monitored by the Homeric court or the Attic theatre but also the poem that gives vent to the author's personal feelings. The Cyclops' cry, "Where have you flown to in your wits" (*Id.* 11. 72) is, I have argued, like Archilochus' self-injunction, a typical male attempt to impose order on his interior world. Magic is antithetical to the assumptions that underlie these attitudes, but not to those adopted by Simaetha. We might fortify the argument that essential gender differences are involved here by considering the broad range of alternatives available to unhappy male and female lovers.

For both the man and woman frustrated or disappointed in love the two larger options are aggressive countermeasures and forms of consolation. In the first group, the most peculiarly and disagreeably male response to frustrated desire is rape (exemplified in Archilochus' seduction-cum-rape in the *Cologne Epode* and throughout Ovid's *Metamorphoses*). The female equivalent is magic, intended to seduce, or punish, or both. Limited options must sometimes have encouraged a female to resort to the magic of drugs or spells; and drugs were always perilous, while spells, as Plato well noted,²⁶ could do psychological harm to a credulous recipient.

Either sex may turn violence against the self, in the form of suicide. However, few males actually go through with it. The singer of Theocritus' Third Idyll talks about it, but his thoughts smack more of self-pitying rhetoric than of desperate intent (25-27). Many more females actually commit suicide. Iocasta, for example, the mother-wife, takes her own life; Oedipus, her husband-son, does not. Often the woman reacts thus to the pressures of love. The Sappho of legend leaped to her death for love of Phaon, while in the grip of unendurable emotions. And whatever complex

²⁵ The lyre of Orpheus that once tamed the Sirens (Apollon. *Argon.* 4. 909) is finally overcome by the discordant song of the Maenads, as they themselves tear him to pieces (Ovid *Met.* 11. 3-22). Among other notable female singers who took root in the Greek imagination is the Sphinx, an *aoidos* (Soph. *O.T.* 36 etc.), who sits belligerently on the city walls, whose song takes the form of the riddle, whose power depends on the riddle's baffling properties, and whose victims are explicitly male (Eur. *Phoen.* 1027). She is mastered eventually by male intelligence.

²⁶ Plato *Laws* 933a-b. The strength of Plato's attack on magic suggests how misleading the extant, elitist, largely male literary tradition may be as evidence for contemporary practice, even in the fifth and fourth centuries.

reasons lie behind the deaths of Deianeira, Phaedra, and Dido, the source of their anguish is unrequited love and self-inflicted death is their desperate last resort. The subject is riddled with complexities²⁷ and the examples cited are, once again, imaginative and male-created. But myth seems here to embody at least psychological realities of ancient life, and probably more than that.

Our second kind of option, namely consolation, is again likely to have taken somewhat different forms for men and women. One form of consolation finds itself on the lessons of experience. The evidence we cited earlier suggests that men tended to appeal to a wider range of experience, to see alternatives more clearly, to be able to apply them more realistically to their own cases, and in particular to recognize the advantages of a more balanced state of the emotions which finds fulfilment in "useful" actions. Even where a man opts for resignation, he is more likely to think it through first. Sappho perhaps also appeals to a law that helps clarify one's thoughts—the biter will inevitably be bit. But this is one of *love's* laws; other kinds of rationalization might have been less accessible to women, or at least less implementable.

A second form of consolation finds itself on the therapeutic properties of song, the extent to which performance itself can be an act of self-ordering. Horace expresses an ideal of *poiesis* when he chides Empedocles for his act of irrational suicide, dismissing him as merely "mad" (*vesanus*, A.P. 296 f.; 464-66), a poet who failed to achieve mastery of himself and his craft. The poet can and should master the "manic" energies of his emotions, and his verse should embody rational control. That way salvation lies. One might read this injunction as founded on principles that social and political realities of ancient life offered more readily to the male than to the female. It is not surprising that according to myth and male prejudice the female, more vulnerable to the pressures of emotion and less likely to have to hand the means of philosophical reflection about realistic alternatives to deal with them, should, if she resists suicide, turn to magic and its hope of wholly automatic forms of control, including self-control. Even the outpourings of a Medea, best represented in Ovid and Seneca, are hardly necessary to the preparation of her poison, but they do reveal and accommodate the depths of the sorceress' passion—even if they do not in this instance exorcize it.

It has been noted that the references to magic ritual in Theocritus' Second Idyll have "every appearance of being true to contemporary practice."²⁸ It is also possible that the spell offered many a desperate woman, no less in real life than in the world of a largely male imagination, a useful resource as a version of therapeutic song. After all, belief in magic

²⁷ For example, the occasional male like Narcissus and Daphnis is destroyed by the power of unrequited love, without recourse to the antidote of sober reflection.

²⁸ Gow (above, n. 1) 35. On Alexandrian magic, see also Monteil (above, n. 1) 52. On magic and the search for "lurid effects" in Hellenistic poetry, see Segal I (above, n. 1) 50.

is sustained by the psychological support such belief provides. As an outlet for women, magical ritual may perhaps be compared with other ecstatic rituals, especially those associated with Demeter and Dionysus. For the woman disappointed in love, the spell's images of binding, burning, and melting suggest the confusions of betrayed love, its energies promise to compel change, its inexorable patterns impose order and so provide their own kind of relief. If such relief has its dark overtones, we should not be surprised. Simaetha's kind of magic is the province of Hecate, whose "hounds tremble as she crosses the graves of corpses and black blood" (*Id.* 2. 12 f.). The aid she brings bears the marks of its origin.²⁹

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²⁹ The songstress of Vergil's Eighth Eclogue seems to fare better than Simaetha. Her magic draws her lover harmlessly to her door, and "may all be well: the dog barks at the doorway . . . Daphnis returns from the city!" (107–09). But Vergil's Eclogue is finally no more about magic than is the Idyll on which it is modelled, but about a certain kind of self-expression: "Is my confidence justified? Or do those who love merely fashion dreams?" Once again, a female singer turns to ritual imperatives that invoke and seek to exorcise spirits from a dark world, but finds only ambivalent solutions.

